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ABSTRACT

This proposal, presented by Morehouse College for consideration for funding, concerns planning efforts to establish a National Center for the Study of Black Family Life. Ten major objectives to be accomplished by the center through research, education, and practice were established. Attributing the family with having the most important influence on the education and achievement levels reached by its members, the "problems" section notes the dearth of data considered objective and adequate on the black family as an institution. This is further reinstated in the "Family as Educator" section where little research is stated to have been conducted on the black family as an educating agent; or on the traditional, comprehensive education which is said to have been taking place within black families throughout history. A detailed study of the black family as educator of its young is said to be a major work to be carried out within the context of the planning efforts directed toward the establishment of a National Center for the Study of the Black Family. A final section entitled the Black Family as Educator outlines the basic question to be investigated and delineates 14 areas which will be included in focusing on family patterns which are said to influence the educational potential of black children. Five stages for the implementation of planning are outlined in detail. (AM)

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PROPOSAL PRESENTED FOR CONSIDERATION FOR FUNDING

Morehouse College is engaged in a planning effort to establish a National Center for the Study of Black Family Life. Research, education, and practice are required in order to accomplish the following objectives:

(1) To stimulate the interest of scholars and researchers in the economic, political, social, psychological, and historical dynamics of black family life.

(2) To serve as a clearing house for disseminating information, ideas, and resources to students, scholars, agencies, and institutions.

(3) To serve as a research center where scholars can interact with black family prototypes and where there is cooperation in disseminating information and giving insight.

(4) To be an initiating force for the development of policy and programs designed to enhance family life.

(5) To provide seminars where families can participate in teaching-learning processes and enhance their understanding of problems and successes.

(6) To provide the opportunity for families in need of services to participate in the delivery of those services and ultimately improve relations between family service agencies and clients.

(7) To provide the opportunity for the direct observation of black family life in both coping and non-coping families.

(8) To stimulate students to explore the possibilities of redirecting the cultural orientation and evaluation of skilled crafts, tying this in with traditional elementary and secondary school instruction.

(9) To develop on-going programs consisting of conferences, short courses, workshops, seminars, etc. to inform community residents as well as to train, refresh, and extend the training of para-professionals and professionals.

(10) To strenthen, and enhance the strong achievement ethnic among black families, and to structure implementary policies and methods.

UD 015373

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The Problem

Family life in the United States is in trouble, but black family life has been characterized as so deeply in trouble that it needs national attention. Traditionally, however, the black family as an institution has not been adequately or objectively investigated. Where it has been treated nationally, research has primarily been limited to compilations of statistics on illegitimacy, desertion, economic dependency, imprisonment, single parent, female-headed households, et cetera. (Andrew Billingsley, Black Families in White America, 1968). These statistics (however systematically compiled) are too often interpreted in vacuo by detached social scientists who hasten to conclude a breakdown in black family life. The controversy and misunderstanding surrounding the Moynihan Report (1965) is the most publicized example of such error. However, this report is not unique, either in its questionable methodology, its misleading conclusions, or its suggestions for "national action." The variables presented in such data are at best symptomatic of graver ills and do not qualify the judgments based on them.

We recognize that there do exist certain catalysts within the family structure which permit and encourage deviant behavior, so that both conventional and deviant behavior of individuals are related to the dynamics of family life. The relationship of these factors, however, have not been backed up empirically, and there is still theoretical imprecision. Societal forces are also important in structuring individual and family behavior patterns, so that it becomes increasingly difficult to assess the empirical weight of antagonisms from the larger community in terms of how and why (or even whether) the family will react to them (Clifton Bryant and J. Gipson, Deviancy and the Family, 1973).

Doubtless, the number of black families that are perceived as unable to cope in this age of complexities is large enough to cause concern. For example,

black men are overrepresented in desertion cases (William Kephart, The Family Society and the Individual, 1961). Where wife and child beatin g are evidenced, they have been related to the fact that black men need marriage and fatherhood to affirm their masculinity; but both also emphasize failure, by placing black men in positions where they are unable to succeed according to societal criteria (Craig Taylor,"The Battered Child," 1971). There are even fewer studies on the reciprocal effects of alcoholism, drug addiction, incareration, and family viability. The research errors and omissions are compounded by the various social welfare agencies (both public and private) which only treat the symptoms and are doomed to failure for this reason as well as for the reason that they treat "categories" of assumed needs rather than human beings. The inability to cope is further enhanced by economic deprivation, although family problems are not limited to the economically deprived. Poor people see themselves as victimized by society; they have little understanding of bureaucratic constraints which pervade social service systems. They regard these systems as structured deliberately to frustrate and to intimidate them. (Henry S. Mass, "Sociocultural Factors in Psychiatric Clinic Services for Children," 1955 and Richard Cloward, "Family Adjustment Agencies," 1967).

On the other hand, adaptive mechanisms are developed to enable families and individuals to temper their vulnerability to a hostile social environment (Vincent Clark, "Familia Spongia: The Adaptive Function," 1966). Herein lie some sources of strength. As Carolyn See indicates in "Three Family Dropouts in Watts," (1968):

> It is the fashion just now to deplore the biological anarchy of . . . Negro ghettos, to talk about the instability of the black family, to devise schemes to keep the man -- who in white life should be the "head of the house" -- inside the house. This misunderstanding between societies is less racial than anthropological. The typical black family does not necessarily represent a decay of, or a falling off from, the ideal white conjugal family, but is another way of dealing with

> the realities of sex, food, shelter, children, fear of loneliness. The Negro family has amazing strength, but it is vertical strength through generations rather than horizontal, from husband to wife.

To suggest such strength and the direction of its flow is facile and some social scientists have been doing so in a limited fashion for several years now. Carol B. Stack ("The Kindred of Viola Jackson: Residence and Family Organization of an Urban Black American Family," 1971) suggests that even this "vertical flow of strength through generations" does not cover all the possible adaptive mechanisms developed by black people. In her investigation she discovers "flexible"adaptive strategies in the form of kinship networks similar to those implicit in Elliott Liebow's discussion of kinship and friendship in (Talley's Corner, 1967) and the "street fathers" alluded to in Ulf Mannerz's discussion of lower-class black male identity formation ("What Ghetto Males are Like", 1971 See also the selected writings and speeches of Robert Coles.)

An important recent study by the National Urban League's Research Department was undertaken because of the increasingly apparent need for more scientifically thorough and unbiased research into the realities of black family life. Robert B. Hill, author of the final report from this research, entitled The Strength of Black Families (1971), states:

> If, as most scholars agree, there is a need to strengthen black families, then a first-order priority should be the identification of presently-existing strengths, resources, and potentials. Systematic examination of the strengths of black families should facilitate the development of national policies and programs which enhance and use these assets to their fullest potential.

Based on statistical data gathered from the U. S. Census Bureau, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Hill documents five vital strengths which have served black families in their struggle to cope with American society: (1) strong kinship bonds, (2)adaptability of family roles, (3) religious orientation, (4) strong work orientation, and (5) high achievement orientation. Although each strength is crucial to the

successful functioning of the black family, the last mentioned -- a high achievement orientation -- is perhaps the most overlooked and the most often denied by social researchers who concentrate on negative rather than positive aspects of the black experience.

Hill describes the overwhelming desire of black families from all social, economic, and educational strata to see their children succeed in the world of formal education and pursue a more prestigious occupation than was accomplished by the parent generation. These lofty aspirations for their children have characterized black families throughout their history in America. An almost religious, unquestioned belief in education as the best means for social, political, and economic advancement has been maintained by black people from the days of Frederick Douglass to Martin Luther King, Jr., regardless of the obstacles to receiving an education or the broken promises realized by those who found doors still closed to them in spite of adequate educational credentials.

Similar to Hill, Dr. Horace Mann Bond, former president of Lincoln University, gathered invaluable data and descriptions of patterns of educational goals and achievements within a number of successful black families. Tracing these families back several generations, the Bond study shows that in addition to the presence of positive community conditions (such as a good mission school), all of the families demonstrated determination, initiative, sacrifice, and hard work to assure that at least one of the children would be able to become educated beyond a minimal level. (Dr. Bond's research papers are maintained in the archives collections of the Atlanta University and Lincoln University libraries).

The works of Bond, Hill, Billingsley, and others mentioned above represent an important beginning step toward understanding the varied dynamics behind the success of certain black individuals and families in adjusting, and indeed excelling, within white society. All point to the family itself as one of the important, if not the most important influence -- whether positive or negative --

on the education and achievement levels reached by its members. All seem to indicate that the family serves as prime educator, in the broadest sense, of its younger generation.

The Family as Educator

Current research in the fields of early childhood education, child development, child and general psychology, and family life points with increasing conviction to the first three or four years of life as the most influential period in the entire development process of human beings. (See Bronfenbrenner, A Report on Longitudinal Evaluations of Preschool Programs, 1974.) It is during these early years that foundations are laid for the future extent and character of physical, intellectual, social, and pyschological development and behavior. Efforts designed to improve the chances of a child's future success in areas of education, emotional strength, physical health, or positive social interaction have increasingly shifted focus from the school years to the pre-school years, from institutions and influences outside the family (such as schools, teachers, community attitudes, or economic conditions) to the family itself and the interactions which take place within its parameters. The family is now seen as the first and by far the most significant teacher of all children. The success/failure of the Head Start programs give supporting evidence.

Families educate their children in a number of specific areas, each overlapping the other and contributing to the overall development from infancy to adulthood. During their early years, most children learn the basic skills of cognition, language, and psycho-motor coordination. The seeds of physical and intellectual strength either take root, are delayed, or might even be destroyed by the richness or barrenness of a child's early learning environment, which is centered around the primary family. In addition to this physical and mental development taking place, young children are also learning -- through innumerable daily informal experiences -- about other aspects of life: personal emotions

and how to cope with the, social and sexual role expectations rights and responsibilities of interpersonal relationships and friendships,freedoms and limitations imposed by the world outside the family and how to manipulate that external world, and expectations of the family concerning behavior patterns, achievement, attitudes, and decisions. Through all of these learning experiences, the child is not only taught how to survive, but is also exposed -- by design or by circumstance -- to the influences which will shape his or her basic self-image and much of his or her capacity for future healthy growth and functioning.

The importance of the family's role as educator cannot be overstated. A convincing thesis on the primacy of family and parenting behaviors on early child development is presented by Dr. Earl S. Schaefer in his article, "Parents as Educators: Evidence from Cross-Sectional, Longitudinal and Intervention Research," (Young Children, April, 1972). According to his interpretation of his own and other work, "Research findings now suggest the need to return to a traditional,comprehensive definition of education as opposed to a restricted, professional and institutional one."

In spite of its importance, little work has been undertaken to look closely at the black family as an educating agent or at the traditional,comprehensive education which has been taking place within black families throughout history. The assumption still exists that most black children are victims of dysfunctional, negative family situations and must therefore receive compensatory education of some kind outside the home in order to make up for a lack of educational preparation and aspiration in the home. Services and programs designed to improve the lives of black children--whether in the area of education, health, social welfare, or psychological counseling--have consistently rested on the erroneous notion that black children must be "saved" from their own families.

Based on a different and positive assumption -- that black families are

indeed important educators of their children -- research is crucial to determine what specific types of early learning experiences, parenting behavior, family structures, and intra-family communication and interaction tend to lead to a black child's successful pursuit of formal education. It is not sufficient to cite a high achievement orientation within black families: what is needed is to understand how families work to realize these high aspirations. Such an understanding would serve as a more definitive and useful indicator of how to 1) establish social policies and services which are supportive of family strengths, and 2) assist families to maximize their own resources to achieve greater success in reaching their goals.

The importance of kin, ritual (fictive) kin, and social networks in the performance of "universal" family and (non-family) functions has been explored rather extensively by anthropologists in transitional societies, e.g., Michael Banton in Sierra Leone, Aidain Southall in Uganda, Kathleen Klumpp in Ecuador, Lee Despres in Guyana. For black American families, however, no affirmative national action has been initiated, either in terms of research to provide the empirical bases for such claims of strength in these mechanisms (and thereby defining the internal dynamics of the flow of strength, whatever its direction) or in therapy to mobilize such qualities of strength toward encouraging the development of functional black families.

The Black Family As Educator

It is our hope to find the support necessary for us to make a detailed study of the black family as educator of its children. As mentioned above, this work will be carried out within the context of our overall planning effort toward the establishment of a National Center for the Study of Black Family Life at Morehouse College.

The broad areas of concern to us were also identified by Billingsley in

his introduction to the Hill study, when it was pointed out that there are several important questions which remain to be answered by careful research efforts:

> (1) What are the historical, contemporary and emerging structures of Black family life in America? (2) What are the patterns of functioning which these families have evolved? (3) What is the relationship between family structure and family functioning? (4) What is the relationship between the operation of the political, economic and social forces of the larger society on the one hand and the structure and functioning of Black families on the other?

A valid analysis of black family life can be accomplished in a setting which has complete and unbiased information and resources available. Adequate therapeutic action can be initiated only when problem areas have been well defined in adherance to the rigors of the scientific method. Such action must be formulated to capitalize on revealed strengths in order to overcome revealed weaknessess. Neither of these tasks will be successfully completed without the direct involvement of the families concerned. In addition to the involvement of the families concerned, there must be involvement of students of the social sciences and education. In a recent paper, "University Research and Problems Posed by Society," (1970) D. Alpert, Dean of the Graduate School of the University of Illinois, reiterates the necessity for community support of any academic endeavor as well as the problem of "relevance" for the students.

The two problems can be attacked simultaneously. Students can be offered an education which will equip them with the skills necessary to make meaningful contributions to the non-academic community both in research and practice by making community involvement an integral part of their academic careers. Because of the increasing rate of change in the American social order, new directions in social science research and practice require the concurrent involvement of the next generation of researchers, practitioners, and educators. Through assess-

ment, analysis, evaluation, and projection, the student actively involved in the structure and content of his own program of studies, will be better prepared to leave the school and go out to work in whatever capacity for the betterment of the larger community. Toward this end, there must be an enrichment of the type of courses to which students are exposed. The most promising kind of enrichment is the extension of the classroom into the community. The "detached" social scientist will thereby be exchanged for the "engaged" social scientist of the future. The educative and informative function of community participation and support are obvious.

Because the problem is neither local nor even regional, the scope of involvement, the mobilization of resources, and the planned impact must not be localized, not even to the extent of limiting ourselves to urban black families. It has been suggested that urban families are in greater need of help and understanding. The implication here is that there is something stablilizing about the rural environment. But whatever is that stabilizing force (and indeed if it is real rather than just imagined), it must be revealed and preserved particularly in an age where the urban/rural dichotomy is becoming less and less informative for understanding social action. The proposed national center would address itself to these needs.

Within the scope of overall planning, we hope to make a detailed study of the black family as educator of its young children. The basic question to be investigated will be: What patterns of family life serve to facilitate or to hinder the success of black children in the area of educational achievement?

Areas which will be included in a thorough look at family patterns which

influence the education potential of black children are as follows:

1. General Learning Environment: Aspirations, expectations, and attitudes toward education existing in the family; learning materials and equipment present in the home; specific learning activities arranged by parents and other adults of the family; positive or negative reinforcements for curiosity, experimentation, or educational achievements, either formal or informal.

2. Verbal Interaction: Predominance of verbal or non-verbal methods of communication within the family; style and content of the verbal interaction, including adult to child, child to adult, child to child, and adult to adult; means of non-verbal communication.

3. Education Status of Parents: Extent and type of education accomplished by the parents; perceptions and attitudes of each parent concerning his or her experience in education settings.

4. Occupation Status of Parents: The employment history and current status of each parent; general economic status enjoyed by the family; attitudes of each parent toward his or her occupation, training, and employment opportunities; general priorities and decision-making process in the area of budgeting distribution of family income.

5. Mother-Child Interaction: Patterns of parenting behavior of the mother; level and style of interactions including physical, verbal, and emotional contact; discipline and behavior controls on the child; consistency of interaction patterns; mother's self-perception; personal needs, goals, and attitudes toward her role as parent; child's perception of the mother.

6. Father-Child Interaction: The same areas of concern as indicated for the mother-child interaction should be included. It is important to look closely at these areas with regard to the father whether he is a regular or an occasional member of the household. In cases of permanent absence or death of the father (or the mother), certain more specific factors should be investigated, as indicated in #14 on the following page.

7. Mother-Father Interaction: Patterns of shared responsibilities and role obligations; positive or negative tone of verbal and non-verbal communication and decision-making; opinions and attitudes of one parent toward the other, especially as articulated to the child.

8. Significant Others: Presence of other adult members in the family; their roles and interactions with the child and the parents; role of significant other played by older sibling. If a significant other person, such as a grandmother, plays a major parenting role, her interactions and behavior patterns should be observed according to the areas included in item #5 on the preceding page.

9. Family Size and Birth Order: The effects of the number of family members on family interactions; effect of birth order (oldest, middle, or youngest child) on behavior, expectations, opportunities, and attitudes.

10. Male-Female Variables: Attitude and expectation differences according to the sex of the child; sex role obligations perceived by the child; specific behavior patterns -- activities allowed, discipline methods; gifts, books, parental interaction, etc. -- which are based on sex.

11. Health and Nutrition: The effects on successful education activities of general good health and nutrition or lack of them.

12. Religion: Influences of religious practice and beliefs on child rearing, expectations, and intra-family interaction.

13. Family Setting: Differences of influence between urban, suburban, and rural living, residence in the North or the South, in an integrated or a segregated community, length of residence in the same location, and proximity of other components of the larger family (parents' siblings, in-laws, cousins, etc.)

14. Traumatic Childhood Experiences: The impact on psychological balance and educational success of specific experiences during early childhood, such as physical violence or abuse, death of a parent, imprisonment or permanent desertion of a parent, severe physical injury or illness.

It is apparent from the content of the areas of research suggested above that great care will be necessary to gather and describe the research data without violating the privacy of families involved. The family selection process will be crucial: black families have too often been used as experimental "guinea pigs" by unsympathetic social scientists. Part of the pre-operational phase of the research component must be to carefully explain the reasons, dimensions, and procedural details to prospective participants, allowing ample time for them to consider these details before agreeing to participate. Beyond a careful family selection process, care must also be taken to select sensitive and skilled data collectors and to design research instruments which are non-threatening and sensitive to family realities as well as technically valid.

Implementation of Planning

Stage I

(1) Planning office is established and staffed.

(2) Coordinator of Planning invites participation from the residential and academic communities.

(3) Design of a community reaction survey.

(4) Soliciting cooperation of nationally recognized experts. (list attached)

Stage II

(1) Nationally recognized experts in the field come to Atlanta to participate in a "brainstorming" session with the academic and residential communities. This session will be used to:

(a) present the concept of a National Center for the study of Black Family Life and receive expressions of support and elaboration of the needs for such an endeavor;

(b) identify the crucial aspects of interest in black family life in order to begin a specification of the focus and programmatic thrust of such a Center;

(c) perform an initial needs analysis of resources and information necessary for such a Center;

(d) begin defining and identifying the audience for receipt of information concerning the Center and its functions.

(2) Report of session will be prepared and disseminated to all participants.

(3) Participants will be charged with responsibility of preparing position papers on specified areas of interest and expertise as defined by the context of the Center's programmatic thrust.

Stage III

(1) Conduct a community reaction survey to test community response to the establishment of such a Center;

(2) Planning Coordinator will review the survey and evaluate

it in light of related activities and literature of a national scope.

(3) Planning Coordinator will design the format of a major conference to receive expert recommendations from national sources concerning the establishment of such a Center.

Stage IV

(1) A major conference will be held in Atlanta at which time experts will present position papers on the areas previously defined (Stage II). These persons will be asked to address:

(a) their components as legitimate areas of concern in the programmatic thrust of the Center;

(b) availability of resources and information concerning their components;

(c) necessary support for their components (fiscal, physical, staffing, orientation); and

(d) identification of target audience for receipt of information dissemination.

(2) Community and faculty persons will react to these position papers. Reaction survey results will be shared.

Stage V

(1) Coordinator of Planning will compile recommendations resulting from position papers and responses into a final report. This report should reflect an analysis of need and desire for such a Center and a statement of support necessary for its establishment. Contained in this final report will be:

(a) a detailed definition of the programmatic thrust of the Center and its component elements or areas of concern, substantiated by expert opinion and community response;

(b) an exhaustive description of the need for such a Center as a national resource;

(c) identification of already-existing resources and information;

(d) expression of fiscal, physical, and staffing needs

of such a Center;

(e) specification of target audience;

(f) suggestion of information dissemination procedure.

(2) The Coordinator of Planning will disseminate this report on planning to participants. Morehouse College and the Atlanta University Center, will then initiate a search for major support of such a Center.

The proposed activity is consistent with the goals and objectives of Morehouse College. At the present time, we are engaged in the following related activities:

(a) seeking support for an in-depth analysis of the social functions of the black church;

(b) a feasibility study in progress to examine our ability to establish a health professional education program which would increase the number of black physicians and dentists;

(c) seeking support for a Center for Historical Research, with special attention being given to Southern and Afro-American personalities;

(d) an annual two-day Black Family Institute.

In order to accomplish the above mentioned objectives of the planning activity we are requesting support.